

In Search of the Movement



REFLECTIONS ON A YEAR-LONG JOURNEY THROUGH THE U.S. LEFT

By NTanya Lee & Steve Williams, p8



TENANTS GET
SQUEEZED
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community calendar

JUNE

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The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 13 times a year on Mondays for our print and online audience of more than 100,000 readers. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 700 journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Indypendent* is funded by subscriptions, reader donations, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. *The Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

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FRI JUNE 7

7pm • Free

READING: CATASTROPHISM WITH SASHA LILLEY, DAVIS MCNALLY, EDDIE YUEN AND JAMES DAVIS.

Join the activists as they probe the reasons why catastrophic thinking is so prevalent. They suggest catastrophic fear results in passivity, paralysis and at worst, reactionary politics.

Bluestockings Bookstore
172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

FRI JUNE 7-SUN JUNE 9

Various hours • Prices vary on sliding scale

\$15-\$65

EVENT: LEFT FORUM 2013.

This is the largest annual conference of left and progressive intellectuals, activists, academics, organizations and the interested public. Participants engage and discuss critical perspectives on the world and share ideas for understanding and transforming it.

Pace University
163 Williams St #2
212-817-2003 • leftforum.org

TUE JUNE 11

7pm • Free

DISCUSSION: BRUCE NEUBURGER ON FARM WORKERS MOVEMENT.

Bruce Neuburger will discuss his book, *Lettuce Wars: Ten Years of Work and Struggle in the Fields of California*, on the history of farm workers movement, what became of it, and the situation of California farm workers today.

Revolution Books
146 W 26th St
212-691-3345 • revolutionbooksnyc.org

WED JUNE 12

4-6pm • Free

RALLY: FAIR CONTRACTS FOR ALL.

Join fellow city workers as all municipal unions gather together for a citywide rally in City Hall Park to demand fair contracts and to tell our elected officials that workers count and workers vote.

City Hall Park
Broadway and Chambers St
uft.org

FRI JUNE 15

11-4pm • Free

EVENT: PEACE & JUSTICE FAIR BROOKLYN.

Members of the Interfaith Peace Coalition of Bay Ridge speak out against the wars in the Middle East and promote comprehensive foreign policy. At their fair, you can gain materials from a variety of social justice groups such as Bread for the World, Food and Water Watch and Move to Amend.

7420 4th Ave, Bklyn
718-680-2981 • panys.org/BR

SUN JUNE 16

2pm • Free

EVENT: PEACE RIDE.

A leisurely peaceful ride to some of downtown Manhattan's peace sites, including the former residence of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Teardrop Park and the Labyrinth for Contemplation. Kids are welcome.

Union Square South
917-577-5621 • times-up.org

MON JUNE 19

12pm • Free / Bus tickets \$25

RALLY: NO TO FRACKING, YES TO RENEWABLE ENERGY.

Unite to tell Governor Cuomo to say no to fracking! In the aftermath of hurricanes Sandy and Irene, New Yorkers Against Fracking call on New Yorkers to forge the states renewable energy future. Buses are being organized from NYC and will leave from 460 8th Avenue at 8am.

East Capitol Lawn
Albany, New York
nyagainstfracking.org

WED JUNE 19

7pm • \$25

WORKSHOP: COMMUNICATING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE.

In this interactive session participants will learn how to navigate challenging conversations by practicing a four-step communication model that transforms critical communication barriers into opportunities for clarity, collaboration and action.

92Y
1395 Lexington Ave
212-415-5500 • 92y.org

WED JUNE 19

10am-12pm • Free

FORUM: MAYORAL CANDIDATES ON NYC TRANSIT.

Public transit is a vital part of life in New York City, with millions of people using the MTA every day. This forum is a chance to hear each mayoral candidate's platform for public transit in New York.

Baruch College
Vertical Campus Conference Center
55 Lexington Ave
212-650-7000 • utrc2.org

THUR JUNE 20

11am-1pm • Free

MARCH: WEEKLY JERICHO WALK.

Join a group of interfaith leaders and immigration activists for their weekly Thursday walk protesting immigration policy in the United States. The Jericho Walk calls for an end to detention and deportation policies that are detrimental to immigrant families in New York and beyond.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office
26 Federal Plaza

newsanctuarynyc.org

SAT JUNE 22

7pm • Free

READING: GHOST RIDER ROADS: AMERICAN INDIANS, FBI AND THE RADICALIZATION OF SPIRIT.

Antoinette Nora Claypoole presents a reading and discussion honoring American Indian Movement leaders and activists.

Bluestockings Bookstore
172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

THUR JUNE 27

7:30pm • Sliding Scale \$6/\$10/\$15

SCREENING: GREEK AMERICAN RADICALS: THE UNTOLD STORY.

The documentary presents the role of the Greek American left in the radical labor movement in the United States from the early 20th century to the McCarthy era.

Brecht Forum
451 West St
212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

SUN JUNE 30

11am-7pm • Free

MARCH & FESTIVAL: MANHATTAN PRIDEFEST.

Come celebrate LGBT pride in Manhattan! Pridefest brings people from far and wide to the streets of New York to celebrate diversity and LGBT life. The march ends in the West Village, where Pridefest will be ongoing during and after the march.

March: Begins 12pm at 36th St and 5th Ave
Pridefest: Along Hudson St btw Abingdon Square and W 14th St
212-607-3300 • nycpride.org

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EVENTS@INDYPENDENT.ORG.**

the reader's voice



The bosses, too.

What about horrible city hospitals? It's personal, my mom was killed in one! What about killer cops who often get only a slap on the wrist, if that? What about the cuts and layoffs that are leaving many people unemployed, hungry and homeless? We the 99% have our faults, but the deck is stacked in the hands of the 1% (Big time!) Odella, wake up and smell the coffee.

— EUGENE CARRINGTON
BED-STUY, BROOKLYN

GET READY FOR FUTURE STORMS

Before I took my nap I was reading a science fiction depiction in that communist freebie, *The Indypendent*, ("The Storm," Issue #186)

about New York City in the near future when more super storms habitually hit Manhattan. I was annoyed that the writer who wrote that tale chose to name his hero Muhammad, therein revealing his own politics. In this perfectly believable tale, Muhammad dies when a Category 4 storm hits Manhattan, overflowing the "Verrazano Surge Wall," an unsuccessful attempt by man to ward off mega-storms that dwarf even Hurricane Sandy of 2012. This story takes place in 2037, the near future. Not only do I find this storm very believable, but I actually expect such things to happen.

I'm 75, an old coot who will probably not live to see that year. I, nevertheless, recall some big wheel politico having refused to even construct a sea wall. I forgot who the jerk is.

— EDWARD GOLDSMITH
EAST VILLAGE, MANHATTAN

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Tenants Face Another Hefty Rent Hike

WHILE LEADING MAYORAL CANDIDATES VIE FOR LANDLORD DOLLARS

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

The city's Rent Guidelines Board is likely to hit tenants with a fat rent increase this month.

The board will vote on June 20 to set the maximum increases allowed in the city's more than 900,000 rent-stabilized apartments, for leases that go into effect beginning in October. On April 30, it recommended guidelines of 3.25 to 6.25 percent for one-year lease renewals and 5 to 9.5 percent for two years. That means this year's increases will likely be substantially more than last year's, which were 2 percent for one year and 4 percent for two years.

As usual, the board's five "public members" backed the increases, while the two tenant representatives objected that it was too much and the two landlord representatives complained it was not enough. RGB chair Jonathan Kimmel said the proposal was based on the board's Price Index of Operating Costs, which estimated that landlords' operating and maintenance costs increased by 5.9 percent last year. Tenant groups criticize the RGB for not considering landlords' actual profits and ignoring what tenants are able to pay and its mission of preventing rent-gouging.

"The index is one-sided, looking only at owners' expenses while ignoring the income they receive and the profits they make," Metropolitan Council on Housing chair Jaron Benjamin wrote in the May issue of *Tenant/Inquilino*, the group's monthly newspaper. "The RGB produces a much more useful study, the Income and Expense Study, but the public members disregard it." That study, based on figures filed annually with the city's Department of Finance by property owners, found that landlords of rent-stabilized properties spent an average of 62 percent of rents they received on operations and maintenance, leaving 38 percent for debt service and profit.

"Does anyone seriously believe that landlords of rent-stabilized buildings are losing

money?" Benjamin asked.

The RGB has frustrated tenants for years. The public members are supposed to be impartial, to balance tenants' need for affordability with owners' need to make a profit, but Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who appoints the members to terms of two to four years, has consistently chosen them from finance and real estate. Only one of his choices has ever voted against raising rents — and Bloomberg refused to reappoint him the next spring.

Current public member David H. Wenk is executive director of capital markets at the real-estate firm Cushman & Wakefield. Courtney Moore is a "private wealth adviser" and executive at Merrill Lynch, serving "high-net-worth families." Jonathan Kimmel is a lawyer specializing in pensions and the former legal director of the city Teachers' Retirement System. The two new public members are Tanya Levy-Odom, a vice-president and equity research analyst at the asset-management firm of Alliance-Bernstein, and Carol Shine, a lawyer for the City Council's land-use division.

THE NEXT MAYOR

All six of the leading Democratic candidates for mayor have urged the RGB not to allow a rent increase. Otherwise, their main ideas



CHRISTINE QUINN: The frontrunner in the mayoral race has received 20 percent of her campaign donations from the real estate industry. Here, she (right) laughs it up with Real Estate Board of NY chairman, Mary Ann Tighe (left) and others at the organization's 2011 Executive Committee meeting.

REBNY/Flickr

issues of overdevelopment. Also, while Quinn has urged that the RGB be opened to more tenant-friendly public members, her enabling Bloomberg's third term gave him another four years to pack the board.

Quinn is the real-estate industry's financial favorite, but of the six main Democrats, only City Comptroller John Liu and longshot former Assemblymember Sal Albanese have not received substantial funding from landlords, according to campaign-finance records available online. Real-estate sources account for about 20 percent of the \$7 million Quinn has taken in, and about 10 percent of the more than \$3 million raised by Public Advocate Bill de Blasio and former Comptroller Bill Thompson.

The list of Quinn's contributors reads like a who's who of the city's biggest and most politically connected real-estate names: The Related Companies, the Durst Organization, Zeckendorf, Kalikow, Rudin, Tishman, Douglas Elliman and Leonard Litwin's Glenwood Management. The Related Companies, which is stuffing her Chelsea-Clinton district with tax-subsidized luxury developments like MiMA and the under-construction Hudson Yards, has given at least \$40,000.

Some of these donors have also contributed to de Blasio and Thompson. Both got the \$4,950 maximum from the Rent Stabilization Association, the landlord group that lobbies to destroy rent stabilization, and The Related Companies has given Thompson at least \$21,000.

New entrant Anthony Weiner's \$5 million bankroll is left over from his congressional campaigns. Its real-estate sources include William Macklowe, Stephen L. Green of SL Green and executives at Vornado and Newmark Knight Frank. Despite his reputation as a loudmouthed liberal, Weiner helped knock a major loophole in rent stabilization in 1994, when he voted

for a City Council bill to deregulate vacant apartments that rented for more than \$2,000 a month. He claimed that loophole, cemented by the state in 1997, would only affect rich Manhattanites who didn't need or deserve regulated rents — but it has fueled skyrocketing rents all over the city.

For this reason, tenant activists are now agitating for campaign-finance reform. Specifically, they want to close the "LLC loophole." State law currently lets owners of multiple limited-liability corporations, a common business structure in real estate, give the maximum amount from each one they own. Leonard Litwin, the most notorious, has given \$500,000 to Governor Andrew Cuomo; contributed to Quinn, de Blasio, and Thompson's current campaigns; and donated \$40,000 to since-indicted state Senator Malcolm Smith in 2008 — when he was running unopposed.



THEREALDEAL.COM

LEONARD LITWIN: This real estate baron has used a loophole in state law to make tens of thousands of dollars for pro-landlord politicians including Quinn and two of her leading challengers, Bill De Blasio and William Thompson. This practice is common in the real estate industry.



NICK CHILDERES

JARON BENJAMIN: Head of the Metropolitan Council on Housing says the Rent Guidelines Board only listens to landlord concerns.

for dealing with the city's housing crisis have been verbal support for stronger rent controls and tweaking schemes for financing "affordable" housing. Only the state government can strengthen the rent-regulation laws, and federal and state funds for public and subsidized housing have been cut dramatically since the 1980s.

Mayoral candidate and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, the frontrunner in both polls and fundraising, has been the most outspoken on rent-regulation issues, longtime tenant activist Michael McKee said in March, but was "the worst" on

RENT GUIDELINES BOARD SCHEDULE

Thursday, June 13

Public Meeting—Public Testimony
10–4pm
Emigrant Savings Bank Building
49–51 Chambers St
Manhattan

Thursday, June 20

Public Meeting—FINAL VOTE
5:30pm
The Great Hall at Cooper Union
7 E 7th St (corner of 3rd Ave, basement)
Manhattan

For more information, go to www.housingnyc.com/html/about/meetings.html or contact the Met Council.

Homophobia is Everywhere

BY JESÚS D. PUERTO

Homophobic attacks can happen anywhere at any time, and for me that is the scariest thing. You can be doing your grocery shopping or walking to work and encounter discrimination. You can be kissing your partner in public and have slurs shouted at you. Right on the New York City sidewalk, in broad daylight or otherwise, you can get shoved, or worse, beaten up. These scenarios are not uncommon.

Our latest tragedy was the death of Mark Carson, a man who was shot because he was gay. It happened in the heart of the West Village, near the historic Stonewall Inn, in a neighborhood where the LGBT community is present and lively and where people feel safe and accepted. His death sparked the largest community response in years, which culminated in a May 20 rally attended by at least 1,500 people, including many of the city's most prominent politicians.

Carson's death is just one of the hundreds of homophobic and transphobic (marked by fear of transgender people) attacks that happen on a yearly basis in the United States. In New York, we've seen an increase in these sorts of attacks in the just the last few months; Police Commissioner Ray Kelly,

at a press conference after Carson's death, laid out the numbers: there have been 22 bias-motivated crimes in New York City this year, up "significantly" from 13 at this time last year.

Like many, I have also experienced anti-LGBT harassment. Perhaps the most distressing of these was an incident that occurred on the New York subway in 2011, when I was headed with a group of Hispanic LGBT youth from the Make the Road NY office in Queens — where I have been an activist and organizer for several years — to Lower Manhattan on the M train. We were on our way to a weekend camping retreat for young LGBT people, organized by an organization called Project Reach. Most of the participants had never experienced being with other LGBT youth for a weekend and the thought filled them with joy as they held their camping gear and excitedly discussed what they wanted to learn, who would help cook breakfast, and how wonderful it was to journey outside the city.

Those feelings of excitement turned into fear and discomfort when a middle-aged woman began screaming homophobic names at us. The words — "Dykes!" "Faggots!" "Lesbians!" "Devils!" — rang in our



FRANK REYNOSO

ears as the train moved, ever so slowly, to the next station. When we finally reached it we left the subway car, shaken and with our eyes tearing.

In that moment I was reminded that homophobia is everywhere and does not turn a blind eye toward anyone. And while much has been said about the increase in hate crimes against LGBT New Yorkers after Carson's death, there are also LGBT community members who hesitate to call the NYPD for support if they are victims of a hate crime. I have seen numerous people of color, low-income New Yorkers and LGBT folks affected by police harassment, a trend that makes it even more difficult for vulner-

able communities to feel safe. Victims of police harassment have organized to ensure police accountability through Communities United for Police Reform, a campaign to end discriminatory policing practices.

Understanding the demands of the LGBT community is not easy, especially because homophobia and transphobia come in many different forms. While we know that youth and transgender people are some of the most vulnerable members of our community, the bullying a young person may face in school or at home differs from the harassment a transgender person may experience on the

Continued on page 16



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INFO SESSION: June 12, 2013

6:15 - 7:30pm at The Murphy Institute, 25 West 43rd Street, 18th Floor, New York City

Marching for Bradley Manning

AS TRIAL BEGINS, AN OUTPOURING OF SUPPORT FOR ARMY WHISTLEBLOWER



RIGHT TO KNOW: Veterans for Peace members Tarak Kauff (left) and Nate Goldshlag (right) carry a banner down Route 175, outside Fort Meade in Maryland.

BY ELLEN DAVIDSON

Ninety-five degree temperatures did not deter hundreds of protesters from marching in the blazing sun at Ft. Meade, Md., on June 1 to support WikiLeaks whistleblower Bradley Manning. "Any day that we are out on the streets for justice is a good day," said Ashley McCauley, one of the protesters.

The rally and march took place two days before the beginning of Manning's trial on June 3. Participants included three busloads of people from New York City, members of organizations such as Veterans For Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, CODEPINK and Courage to Resist, and others that came from around the country in support of Manning.

The 25-year-old Manning faces 22 charges. He is accused of releasing nearly a million classified documents, including diplomatic cables, army reports on Iraq and Afghanistan and the notorious "Collateral Murder" video showing U.S. soldiers shooting unarmed civilians in Iraq in 2007. The trial is expected to take more than two months, with more than 100 witnesses scheduled; 24 of these are secret and will testify behind closed doors.

Manning does not deny leaking the documents and has already pled guilty to 10 of the lesser charges, but maintains that he released the information because he believed it was important for the public to know, saying in online chats that he hoped to start a debate on U.S. foreign policy.

The most serious charge he faces is that of aiding the enemy. In pretrial hearings, the prosecution contended that merely releasing the documents constituted guilt, a framework that Bradley Manning Support Committee steering committee member Kevin Zeese characterized as "very dangerous for the media." The judge rejected this, but also denied the defense's assertion that the prosecution had to prove that Manning

intended to "aid the enemy," instead saying that the knowledge that releasing the documents would "aid the enemy" was sufficient to prove guilt.

Manning has gotten strong support from antiwar veterans. At the pre-march rally on June 1, Veterans For Peace member Ward Reilly said to the crowd, "Bradley Manning's duty was to report what we reported. If you tell the truth in this country, you go to prison. ... Bradley Manning should never have been in Iraq to begin with to see what he saw, and that is our collective failure, to not control the politicians and the war criminals. It is our job to see that those war criminals go to jail and take Bradley's place."

Heather Linebaugh, a former Air Force drone intelligence analyst, also spoke. "I did the same intelligence analysis as Bradley Manning. I saw the horrors of war and the needless killing every day that I served. I saw the lies that we tell people every day. I saw what really happens in war, the unjustified killings, because officers tell the enlisted: 'That's what you're ordered to do, shut the hell up and do your job.' If we tried to talk about it, if we tried to tell someone else about it, we were told, 'It's okay, collateral damage happens. You just have to accept it.' We treat Bradley Manning as a criminal, when he really woke us up to something that happens every day."

She asked for support for the whistleblowing community, saying, "There's hundreds of other intelligence people in this country and abroad right now that would love to tell you what's really happening, but we're terrorized that we aren't allowed to let anyone know the true horrors of what's happening in the war. I ask all of you to just wake up to what's really happening, because the drone program is not a joke. There are people behind those drones being forced to kill people for illegitimate reasons. It's not a killing machine robot. It's a war. There's people dying."



DEMOCRACYNOW.ORG

TUNE IN

NYC RADIO

WBAI 99.5FM 8am M-F

NYC TELEVISION

CUNY-TV

6:30pm M-F, 1am Tu-F

Manhattan MNN

8am and 7pm M-F

Brooklyn BCAT

9am M-F

DISH Network & DirecTV

Free Speech TV

8am, noon, 8pm

and midnight M-F

8am, noon, 7pm Sat

8am, noon Sun

Link TV

11am and 6pm M-F

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with Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzalez



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LEFT FORUM WEEKEND

JUNE 6-8

Bluestockings will be hosting PM authors presenting at this year's LEFT FORUM.

THU JUNE 6

Drawn to New York: An Illustrated Chronicle of Three Decades in New York City.

FRI JUNE 7

Peter Kuper's illustrations and comics have appeared in Time, New York Times, and MAD where he has written and illustrated "Spy vs. Spy" monthly since 1997.

SAT JUNE 8

Capitalism Must Die! With Stephanie McMillian - A basic, easy-to-understand introduction to what capitalism is, how it works, and why it's evil. This talk is accompanied by cartoons and illustrations.



Seattle Test Boycott Victory

ONE STEP IN THE STRUGGLE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

Editor's note: On January 10, teachers at Seattle's Garfield High School unanimously refused to administer the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test to their ninth graders. The teachers said the test was unreliable and a waste of students' time. With strong support from parents and students, the boycott soon spread to other Seattle schools and sparked anti-testing actions across the country. On May 13, Seattle teachers heard the news they had been waiting for.

BY JESSE HAGOPIAN

"High schools may opt out of MAP in 2013-14."

This message was in an all-district communication blast, sent at 2:06pm on Monday, May 13 by Seattle Public School Superintendent Jose Banda, and led to spontaneous end-of-day celebrations by teachers and students around Garfield High School. Students fist-bumping teachers. Teachers high-fiving each other. Ad hoc assemblies in the hallway to congratulate each other.

Until now, the "Measures of Academic Progress" (MAP) tests were required by the Seattle School District for all students in grades K through 12. A unified group of Garfield teachers announced in January that they would no longer administer the tests to students at Garfield. Other Seattle schools followed suit, and the bravery of these teachers led to a national movement.

Why were Garfield teachers celebrating the discontinuing of the MAP for our stu-

dents next year?

We celebrated because we know hundreds of hours of student time will no longer be wasted on a test the district has now acknowledged is inappropriate for our students.

We celebrated because our English Language Learner students will no longer be humiliated by taking a test that is not culturally or linguistically appropriate and they will now have more hours to spend on the additional instructional time they need.

We celebrated because our special education students will not have to fidget in their chairs when they strike a computer key for the MAP test that never accounted for the student's individualized education plans.

We celebrated because our students will no longer have to stare at the dull glow of a computer screen as they contemplate what possible answers they could give to questions on material that was never part of their state-mandated curriculum.

We celebrated because our evaluations would not be tied to test scores generated by bored students who have no motivation to perform well on possibly their fifth standardized test of the year. Annoyed students have been known to select "C" for each and every answer on that silly test.

We celebrated because we still have jobs we love, and because our superintendent had to back off of his original threat to suspend teachers for ten days without pay for refusing to administer an ill-conceived test (for which the district spends hundreds of thousands of dollars each year).

We celebrated because teachers, parents and students across the country (from Aus-

tin to Boston) and around the world (from New Zealand to England) have been inspired by our resistance and are waging their own battles for quality assessment.

Perhaps most of all, we were celebrating because we are building a collaborative spirit of faculty and student solidarity at Garfield. Our students know we have their best interests at heart, and that the power of our commitment to truth can overcome the powerful.

Yet while teachers at five of Seattle's high schools (Chief Sealth, Center School, Ballard, Ingraham and Garfield) who joined the MAP boycott are elated by the news of this victory, Superintendent Banda's e-mail also warned that students in kindergarten through eighth grade will still be required to take the test next year.

Our victory, then, remains incomplete. Faculty at ORCA (K-5) and Thornton Creek Elementary have raised equally powerful arguments about the flawed use of the test at the primary grade levels. Moreover, the Department of Education released results from its 2012 study, showing the MAP to be ineffective at improving reading levels for students in the fourth and fifth grades. Similarly, the Chicago school district recently announced it was suspending the MAP for grades K-5 — a clear indication

the MAP isn't serving the youngest pupils either.

For these reasons, Seattle's high school teachers will continue to join with our K-8 colleagues to call on the Seattle School District to terminate its contract with the MAP test company at the end of this school year (when the agreement expires). The key to the victory over the high school MAP test was solidarity and widespread public support, and we intend to carry these lessons forward to change policy for K-8 schools as well.

As we both continue to build the movement to scrap the MAP and celebrate our huge victory, we shouldn't forget the answer to this year's end-of-semester exam: if we stand for what's right for students, teachers can win.

Jesse Hagopian is a public high school teacher in Seattle and a founding member of Social Equality Educators (SEE). An earlier version of this article appeared on CommonDreams.org.



TEACHERS UNITE: The Seattle Education Association (top), Occupy Austin Independent School District (bottom) and the Elementary Education Department in the College of Education at San Francisco State (left) showed their support for the Garfield teachers' boycott of the MAP test.

A Laboratory on Wheels

PHOTOS BY ASHLEY MARINACCIO
TEXT BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

Seen from the outside, the brightly-colored BioBus looks like it just rolled out of a Ken Kesey novel. Take a look inside and you will find the refurbished 1970s-era San Francisco transit bus is a high-tech laboratory on wheels, boasting an array of scientific equipment. For the people who work on the BioBus, it is the perfect vehicle for exposing the city's students to science, including those at Bronx Little School who received a visit from the BioBus earlier this spring (See photos below). According to Danny Valdes, the project's program coordinator, the BioBus will visit 96 schools this year and will spend part of the summer parked in front of New York City Hall of Science in Flushing Meadow-Corona Park in Queens.

"Every day we are changing at least one kid's mind about science," Valdes said. "Kids experience science in a textbook. Then they come on the Biobus and see their own cells. That totally changes the way they are learning."



INQUIRING MINDS: Through science, first graders learn how to ask questions and think critically.



GATHER UP: Biobus program coordinator Danny Valdes spurs the enthusiasm of a first grade class at the Bronx Little School. BioBus volunteers help teach, develop curricula, apply for grants, maintain the group's website, scrape mud out of creeks, collect the veggie oil that fuels the bus and much more.



TINY CRITTERS: A kindergartner looks through a microscope at a daphnia, a tiny, translucent water flea whose bodily functions can be easily observed. For many students, BioBus is the first experience they have with science. This visit was funded by a private foundation, because Bronx Little School's science program was eliminated due to budget cuts.



JOY OF SCIENCE: Students and their teacher watch as everyday objects appear up close on a large screen at the back of the bus.

For more, see www.biobus.org.

Looking to Build a Larger Movement

BY STEVE WILLIAMS

My parents used to say that I was born in the wrong decade. As survivors of the segregated South who had graduated from Spelman and Morehouse Colleges in 1964, they had witnessed the rise of one of world's great social movements. They now worried about their would-be revolutionary son growing up in the time of Reagan and reaction. Some nights, before going to sleep I wished that I had been alive in the 1960s.

I became an organizer in 1992 after I finished college. For the next 20 years, I organized with homeless and low-income people for economic, racial and gender justice in San Francisco — for five years with the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness and for the next fifteen with POWER (People Organized to Win Employment Rights), a community organization of working class African-American and Latino workers, tenants, students and transit riders that I co-founded in 1997. During my time at POWER, I had the opportunity to recruit new fighters in the movement and to meet other organizers and activists across the country through the different campaigns and alliances that we were a part of.

The time that I spent working at POWER included some of my proudest moments, but with the economic collapse of 2008, I sensed that the movement was missing historic opportunities to advance a liberatory agenda. I decided to leave my position at POWER to focus my energies on building a massive popular movement. This was August 2011 — three weeks before Occupy Wall Street began.

Inspired by the experiences of the great African revolutionary Amílcar Cabral who used his experience as an agronomist to strengthen the national liberation movement in Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau, I dreamed of interviewing organizers and activists from across the country about their

insights and experiences on the frontlines of struggles for justice, sustainability and dignity. Now that I was unemployed, nothing was holding me back. After discussing the idea with another recently unemployed San Francisco organizer, NTanya Lee, the Ear to the Ground Project was born.

LISTENING CLOSELY

The two of us set out to interview at least 150 organizers and activists. From the beginning, we knew that we wouldn't be able to talk to all of the amazing organizers and activists doing important work in the United States. In fact, we were scared that few people would be interested in a project such as this; we only hoped that the people we asked would be polite enough to grant us an interview.

Some of the people that we interviewed I knew from work we had done together in local organizing campaigns or national alliance work. Some I considered comrades, and others didn't know well but was interested in their assessments. But the interviews that were most powerful were those with people I was meeting for the first time. I was repeatedly surprised and humbled by the trust and generosity that people showed me — not only with their honest reflections but also by inviting me into their homes and sharing food with me.

This experience has changed me in many ways. I listen better now. The idea of the Ear to the Ground project always drew from the notion that all good organizing begins with listening, but amidst the pressures of

Continued on page 16

Overcoming Fragmentation

INTERVIEW BY JOHN TARLETON

In 2011, NTanya Lee quit her job as the executive director of a San Francisco-based community organization to launch the Ear to the Ground Project with fellow Bay Area organizer Steve Williams. A veteran of three decades of social justice activism dating back to her childhood roots in the black working class of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Lee spent the past year interviewing 158 fellow left activists and organizers across the United States about their work and the hopes they had for seeing a "movement of movements" emerge that could effectively challenge business as usual in this country. Lee and Williams recently released their first report (More Than We Imagined: Activists' Assessments on the Moment & The Way Forward), which provides a candid snapshot of how those who are fighting social justice every day perceive the challenges facing them.

JOHN TARLETON: Many people on the Left are discouraged at this moment, yet your report strikes a hopeful note. Why is that?

NTANYA LEE: I came out of the interviews sobered by people's assessments of the weaknesses of our movements and the challenges we need to overcome. Yet, in those same sobering conversations, people were so hungry, so ready to take the conditions of these times and be more bold with their work and do their work in different ways. Even though people weren't clear which way to go or on an overall strategy to strengthen our movements, that internal courage and readiness and hunger is essential to be able to move and people have that all over the country.

JT: What do you mean by "movement"? How is that different from having a collection of individual groups each pursuing their own campaigns?

NL: For us, a movement exists where there's sustained, ongoing activism of many different forces working toward a common goal around shared values. From our perspective, there are actually many movements in the United States that are happening. The work in front of us is not to grow one big movement, but to build a movement of many movements.

JT: In the eyes of the activists and organizers you spoke with, what are some of the fundamental challenges that they face?

NL: One of the most common things people talked about was the level of fragmentation. In the United States, for a variety of historical and political reasons, social justice workers are really isolated from each other. They are all in these different silos fragmented by racial identity groups, constituency, etc. This is a core weakness but it's not the underlying weakness. The underlying weakness is a lack of coherent politics. There's not a coherent set of ideas that brings all our political work together, and that is what leads to fragmentation.

The other thing a lot of people talked about was how "movement culture makes hard work harder." People and organizations who are doing really good work for justice are sort of infested by dominant values like competitiveness, ambitiousness and ego-drive work and people with insecurities end up manifesting interpersonal rivalries that are very destructive. We are calling for a renewal of culture that goes back to some feminist values that have been lost in a lot of social justice organizations, where there's a real belief that how you do the work together matters.

JT: You raise the issue of race a lot in your report. Why must a racial analysis be central to left movements?

NL: Capitalism is racialized and white supremacy is embedded into the structure of it. The experience of working people differs depending on how they are racialized in this society. Our strategies have to take that into account. You can't just organize workers, you have to organize people by

Continued on page 16



What Is to Be Done?

39 EXCITING IDEAS FOR THE LEFT

COMPILED BY NTANYA LEE AND STEVE WILLIAMS

NTanya Lee and Steve Williams' report on the state of the U.S. Left includes a catalog of suggestions ("75 Exciting Ideas for the Left") that emerged from their interviews with grassroots organizers and activists. Here is a sampling of what they heard. For more, and for a full copy of More Than We Imagined, see www.eartothegroundproject.org.

RE-ORIENTING OUR WORK & BUILDING MOVEMENT COHERENCE

- 1 We need to push our demands and analysis.
- 2 We need to break out of defensive fights — picking our issues, setting the stage and following it all the way through.
- 3 We need to build power that is based on worldview and ideology, not just policies, and gets us out of silos and in a position to put out a broader set of proposals.
- 4 We need to put aside some assumptions about how social movements work. Don't assume things are going to happen like they have in past movements.
- 5 We need to lift up conversations about race in everything we do because race is intertwined with every major social justice issue we face.
- 6 Develop a narrative about society and the economy that is compelling and resonates with people, and has a name that people can talk about and debate. People are fearful of losing their credibility but we need to address these questions.
- 7 Create spaces for organizers to develop relationships of trust and solidarity across organizations, issues, campaigns,

POLITICAL EDUCATION & BASE-BUILDING

- 21 The idea work needs to get done now, the sharp analysis, so our demands can be big enough to match the scale of the multiple crises we face. Otherwise the next upsurge could be around small demands.
- 22 We need to remember it's not enough to wage solid strategic organizing campaigns. People become leftists because their consciousness shifts. That has to happen at a much broader level, in different sectors. Building people's political consciousness is a minimal requirement for ever winning.
- 23 In the Black community, we need a big push on international awareness, with exchanges to Palestine, etc. Historically, our international outlook has been at a much higher level. The broader movement will not be a righteous and powerful one without progressive Black organized forces with an international, anti-imperialist perspective.
- 24 Become better at talking about war and militarism, and deal with why the leadership of the anti-war movement is so out of touch with working class people of color communities.

so we can learn from each other's experiences.

- 8 Learn to build united fronts that magnify our power.
- 9 We need some cross-pollination. People should travel through different parts of the country to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening in rural and urban areas as well as differences among the regions.
- 10 We need a new, nonsectarian Left that includes folks from all the trends in the past that don't matter now. Learning from the 1970s — we have to be very careful about declaring people enemies.
- 11 We need to know what we should agree on:
 - Understanding of and opposition to the capitalist state
 - How race, gender and class have operated in the U.S.
 - Key elements of our vision, including our view of the state and the role of popular democracy
 - The critical importance of ecology and what it means for what we're trying to build
 - International solidarity

25 Send organizers out into the field. Many organizers spend their time developing a political program or going to all these meetings, and have less time to be out in the field, hearing where folks are really at.

26 Let's look at what's innovative about online organizing and respond to people's new ways of thinking and relating to each other. The community organizing model has not grappled with the structural shifts in people's consciousness related to the dramatic shifts in technology, media, speed of visual culture.

27 We need to organize strategic sectors of the white working and middle classes. The Right is organizing them around a racist set of ideas, there are millions of working people who are struggling, who are increasingly precarious and insecure, who can be won over to the Left.

28 We need to expand the movement's attention to organizing in places where there are demographic shifts such as the South and Southwest. Combined with our centers of progressive work on the coasts, plus the Upper Midwest, we will have the basis for a new bloc.

so we can learn from each other's experiences.

MOVEMENT CULTURE & NEW POLITICAL FORMATIONS

- 12 We have to stop being so fucking cranky. It's important to dream. That's why artists and youth are so important.
- 13 We need to focus on internal transformation. Oppression, capitalism — we are in those systems, and they are in us. So the work is at the individual, and social/structural levels.
- 14 Pause. Slow down. The pace we have is unsustainable. We need to get clear and focused and you can't do that if you're just always tired and used up.
- 15 We need to push against our left purifying tendencies and against obsession with process.
- 16 Movements for economic and racial justice have neglected feminism in terms of their internal culture. Macho behavior hurts comradeship and solidarity. We need feminist social relations.
- 17 We need to shed our sentimentality and identification with what

currently exists. Our movement isn't organizations, we are a web of people. We will create vehicles as necessary but we should also destroy them as necessary. Institution-building can destroy the heart and spirit that led to the creation of an organizational form.

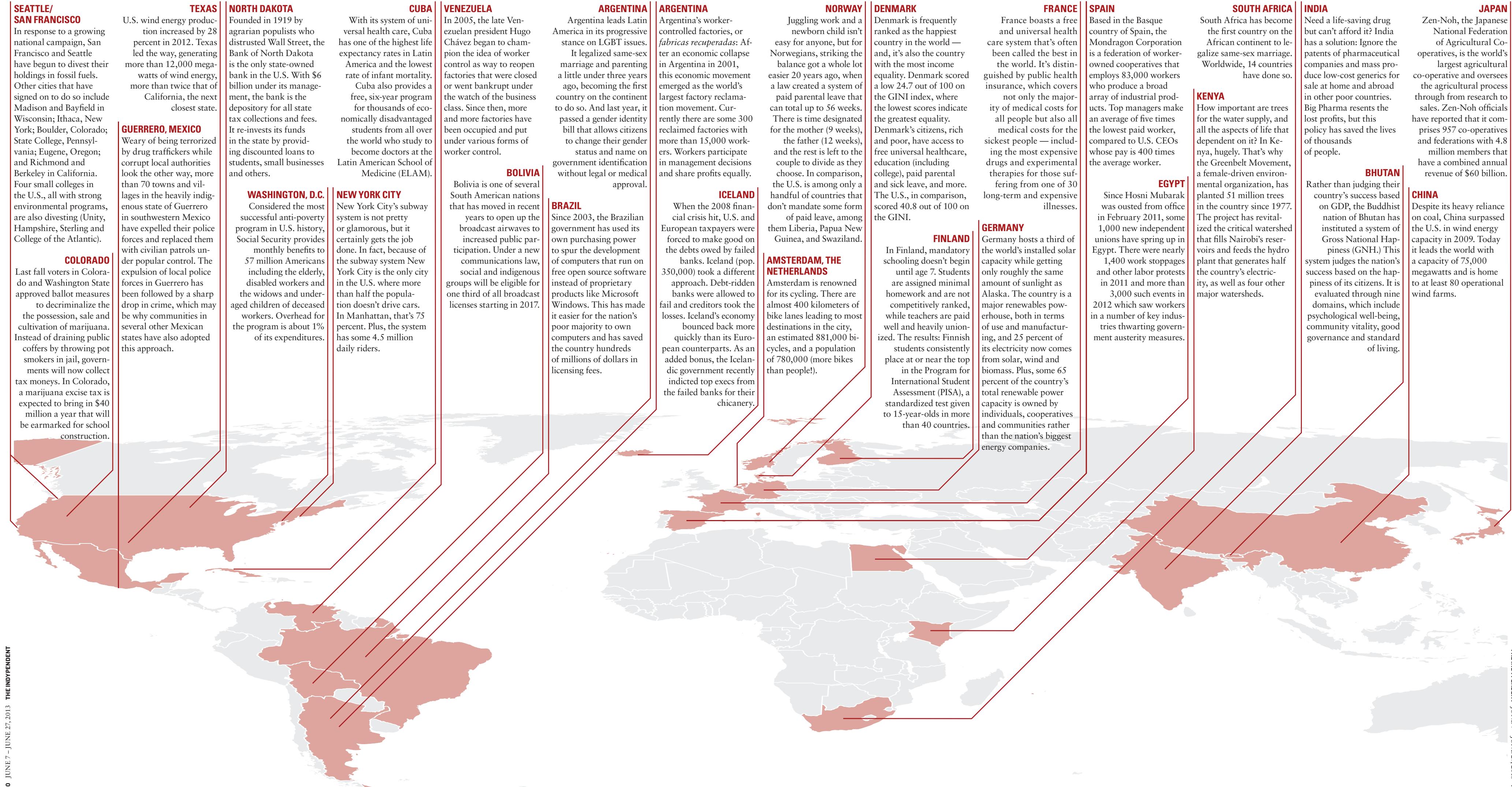
- 18 We need to make a structured, strategic, organized break with the Democratic Party as the central gathering point of progressive politics in the U.S. There should be, roughly speaking, a truly mass third party, but not one specifically focused on elections, led by working class people of color.
- 19 We need a labor federation that includes community-based worker center organizations on an equal basis to traditional labor unions.
- 20 Push for a 30-hour work week — both as a mass demand for everyone, and for our sector, so people can have time to do movement work outside their paid jobs, and have time to build the kind of strong families and communities we need.

CAMPAIGNS & INFRASTRUCTURE

- 29 Climate justice is a unifying rallying call for people around the world. There's an opportunity to link our local struggles and organizing with a global struggle to fight back and put forward a new vision.
- 30 The Keystone XL Tar Sands pipeline is a key fight, pointing a way to build large cross-sector alliances willing to engage in direct action.
- 31 We need to fight the right level of power: corporate power, not government, and we need to play offense by making our way up the money and power tree to who's really in charge. Take Wal-Mart for instance, the largest private employer in the U.S. Fighting them could unite us.
- 32 Our base-building groups need to expand our tactics beyond run-of-the-mill, show up at city council, do a petition kind of actions. Occupy was inspiring there.
- 33 We need a TON more people ready to do direct action and nonviolent civil disobedience. We need to be more politically confrontational with the state, which is connected to our need to be more politically independent.
- 34 We need to identify ways not just to get foundations to better resource
- 35 We need to build new leadership to take over our institutions. We need to strengthen how we're developing second-tier leadership.
- 36 We need to become more creative about resourcing our work outside of the foundation world. Tithing 1% of our personal and organizational resources to the Left should go to work that advances cross-sectoral movement-building and Left activities, especially work that takes strategic risks and would never be funded by foundations.
- 37 We need to figure out how to take advantage of new technologies that make messaging and reaching people cheaper and easier.
- 38 We need to dramatically scale up our new media and communications capacity. We need a pipeline of people of color especially getting trained in necessary technical skills.
- 39 Our movements need a national press, a national organizers' magazine where we can communicate our ideas, reflections, analysis to each other.

WITHIN OUR REACH

EXAMPLES OF HOW TO CREATE A JUST AND HEALTHY SOCIETY ARE ALL AROUND US



BY JOHN TARLETON & ALINA MOGILYANSKAYA
ADDITIONAL WRITING & RESEARCH BY TIMOTHY BIDON & EMILY MASTERS
ILLUSTRATION BY MIKAEL TARKELA

Can you imagine this? — Living in a world where we all have access to free or low-cost medicine and health care; our energy sources are sustainable and carbon-free; employees own the businesses they work for; corrupt police forces are disbanded and greedy bankers go to jail; all children attend high-quality schools and teachers are treated with respect; the elderly are provided for; marijuana is fully decriminalized and people are permitted to marry whomever they please. It's not easy during times like these. But, it's worth remembering that the ingredients for the kind of society we want to see aren't just ideas but exist in the world, scattered all around us waiting to be fought for, emulated and expanded upon.

Society of Addiction

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

I waited three months to eat a Krispy Kreme. I mean I waited. Every week or so, I take the train to Penn Station, quickly zigzagging through crowds. And every time I have the same internal monologue — *Don't stop at the Krispy Kreme. Don't give yourself diabetes. Seriously, you might as well inject Elmer's glue straight into your heart.* But then I saw the store, bright and beautiful and smelling good. It's very hard to walk past Krispy Kreme. It's like those dreams where my legs move but I don't go forward.

And then I begin the junkie's debate — *C'mon it's been three months! Besides, one can't hurt. And didn't I help that homeless lady get her shit to the shelter last night. That was an Oprah thing to do. And doesn't Oprah eat donuts?* I was drooling before I even turned. Everyone on line had the same wild look. I feared for the servers. If they didn't get us the donuts quickly we might have smashed the glass. When I got mine and bit into it, sugar and preservatives and trans-fat flooded my body and I lit up like a Christmas tree. It felt like Jesus descended from Heaven and kissed my brain.

Afterwards I felt dirty, guilty. At home, I googled Krispy Kreme and found a YouTube clip of comedian Chris Rock prowling the stage. "Krispy Kreme donuts are so good," he said, "if I told you it had crack in it you'd go, 'I knew something was up ... got me knocking on the donut window at two in the morning. C'mon man open up, give me one more donut, I'll do anything. I'll suck your dick.'"

Rock chuckled maniacally as the audience roared. I paused the clip and let it sink in. How much of what we eat is not really food but a drug designed to addict us with a rush of sugar, salt or fat? McDonald's, Checkers and the other fried fast-food places line the streets in Bed-Stuy. Neighbors have that addict's scratch-the-neck gesture at bodegas where they buy sugary drinks or candy. But it wasn't just food. How many times do I check my cell phone? I get itchy if I don't send or get a text. How many people do I see on the street, heads down, typing away, swerving around the traffic as if by radar?

In New York, we bounce like billiard balls between ads showing actors posing with a titanium watch and rappers with liquor bottles and sand-caked, teen bodies next to perfume vials. All the time, I see people waddling out of stores with bulging shopping bags, faces bright with the joy of a new purchase. Flush faces are the tell-tale sign of a dopamine rush. We get high from buying commodities that enhance our status. In this light, we can look at corporate stores and see them as consumer crack houses. If it's true that billions of people around the world are being addicted to our evolutionary Achille's heel of salt, sugar, fat and status, then it's time to ask the question. Are we capitalism junkies?

THE COMMODITY

A commodity in classical political economy is any object that can be bought or sold in the marketplace. The market is any institution or place where we can engage in trade, be it Wall Street or the farmer's stall at Union Square. From the market's beginning 12,000 years ago with the Neolithic Revolution, when we first cultivated land, grew crops, and created surplus and trade to the post-industrial digital

stock exchange, it has grown to dominate human life.

Today everything around us — clothing, apartments, food and technology — is a commodity. We wear commodities. We live inside commodities. We use and eat commodities. All that we need to live is filtered through the market. And if the store shelves are packed with bright colorful things, we feel safe because we have the freedom to choose.

The commodity has for centuries been the site of critique. In political economy it was an article of trade that satisfies a human need. Later it was reinterpreted by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* as a fetish object concealing the exploitative relations of production. More than a century later, post-structuralist Jean Baudrillard redefined it as a sign in a larger social code.

Today, a view emerging from neuroscience understands capitalism as an immersive form of market totalitarianism. We see that advertising and commodities are designed to get us to a "bliss point," to stoke a chemical blaze in our brains that incrementally robs us of the ability to choose. And this is the paradox; American culture is based on the ideal of freedom — freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom to choose — but its economy is increasingly based on targeting the unconscious and addicting our bodies. Corporations use science to ensnare deep evolutionary impulses. We are left with a tragic contradiction; the very act of consumption that we are taught is our freedom is also what most enslaves us.

BEHOLD THE iPHONE

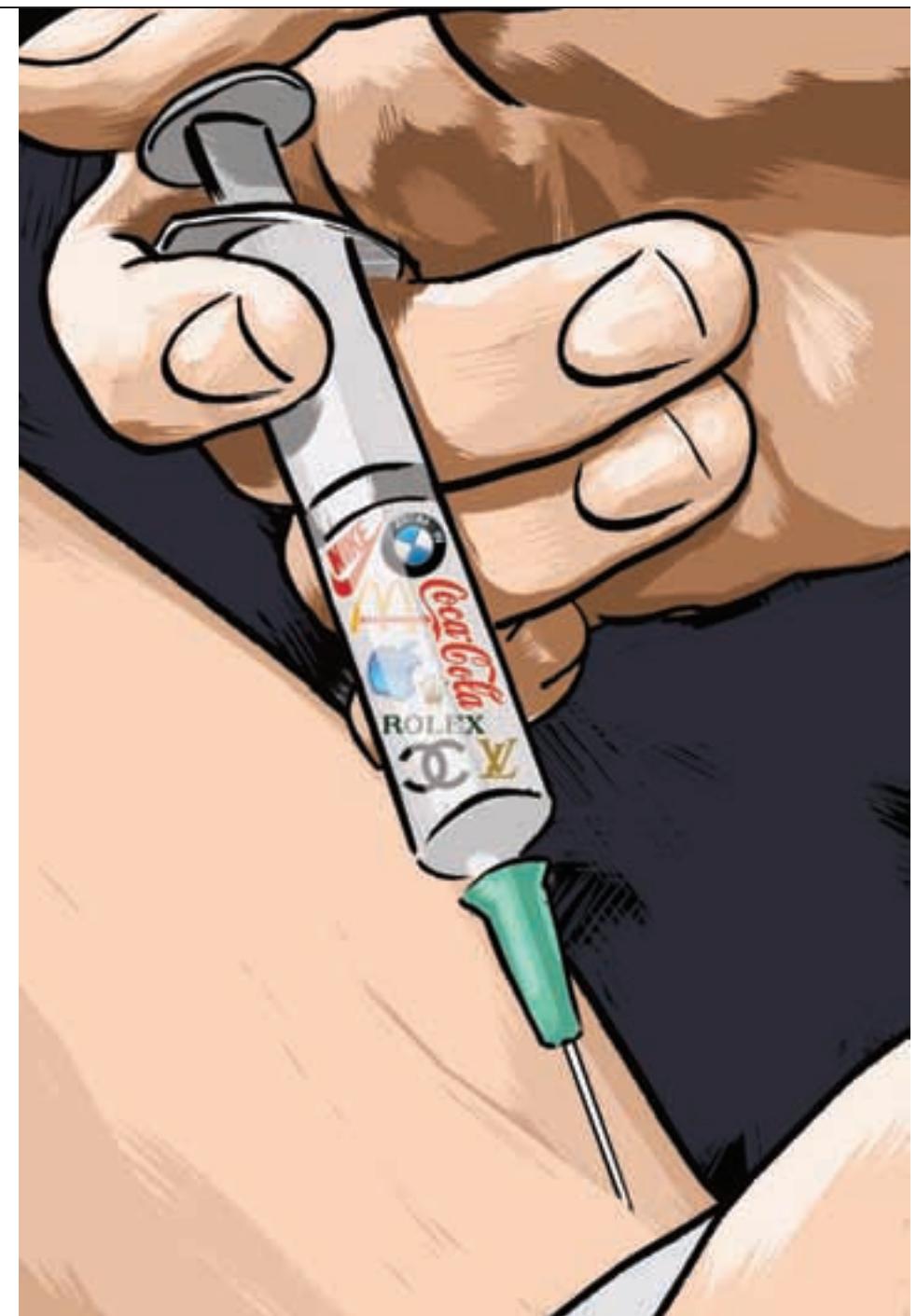
My cell phone was old. No touch screen. No internet. My friends would whip out smartphones and get precise, Googlemapped directions to the next bar. I took mine out, pretended to type an address and confidently offered random bullshit names like The Thirsty Wolf or Chug.

"Wait why can't I see those?" one friend asked me. I quickly put my phone away, "Oh damn, battery just ran out. Sorry. So what did you find?" But I was content with my Flintstone-era cell phone until one day it broke. After one hour without a text or the ability to send one, I began to shake and sweat. I sprinted to the Virgin Mobile store, where the staff calmed me down, gave me water, patted my back.

In seconds, I was holding my future phone. But I saw it four different ways. The first was a symbol of the American Dream, a set of ideals that put prosperity and upward mobility at the center of our lives. Smartphone commercials make it into a tool of consumer empowerment. No one and nothing is out of reach.

Through a Marxist lens, I saw the swollen-eyed, arthritic Chinese workers at Foxconn, which if it didn't make Virgin Mobile smartphones, made them for Apple and made them in the millions. In the Marxist tradition this human labor is eclipsed by the object's transformation into a commodity through market exchange. We see its price tag or advertisement but not the people who made it or the fact that so many killed themselves by jumping off the roof of Foxconn that the company hung up nets.

Seen through Baudrillard's theory, my smartphone was a sign in a larger social code that recreated my identity. It was not simply a way to talk to friends. It was a *smartphone*. I now had instant access to information and



ROB LAQUINTA

was re-booted as a modern man. No asking directions or standing in line for a ticket at a cinema. Now I could do it all before I got there. Smartphone ads play on the theme of being up to date. One showed a trio of guys at a sports game: the ones with the 4G smartphones knew it was going to rain while the one with the 3G did not; he was doused when thunder broke. Today, commodities come with a story line and are the material anchors for the social roles we play.

Turning my new phone over and over in my hand, I remembered that itchy feeling when my phone ran out of energy or when it was broken. Turning it on, I googled addiction, smartphones and lo and behold, I found a painfully in-your-face article titled "Why We're All Addicted to Texts, Twitter and Google." It spelled out why I slept with my phone at night like a teddy bear. Written by Dr. Susan Weinschenk and based on research by Terrence Robinson and Kent Berridge, the article said our brains squirt dopamine not to make us feel pleasure (a concept still used but debated) but to make us seek it out.

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter; it carries signals from neurons through synapses to other neurons or cells. Like Halle Berry in *Monster's Ball*, it "makes me feel good." It lights up the brain. It gets us moving toward satisfying goals. Weinschenk writes, "Dopamine causes you to want, desire and search ... From an evolutionary standpoint this is critical. Dopamine keeps you motivated to move through your world, learn and survive. It's not just about physical needs such as food or sex, but also about abstract concepts. Dopamine makes you curious about ideas."

In the scholarly article "Addiction," Berridge and Robinson state that there are two systems in the brain, one that involves dopamine based on wanting and the other based

on liking, the opioid system, which gives us pleasure. The former says, "Go!" The latter says, "Stop and enjoy." But with social media, we now live in a culture where the "Go!" light is always green. In seconds we can text, Facebook, Google or call and get rewarded, which incites us to seek again, which rewards us again, causing us to seek again and be trapped in a dopamine loop.

The saddest image of the article was of dying rats. Scientists destroyed the dopamine neurons in rats and they died of starvation, even when food was right in front of them. They lost "the will to live" or the chemical base of "will power," aka dopamine. In another test, scientists electrically stimulated the brains of lab animals to produce dopamine. Rats furiously, feverishly pressed the lever to tingle themselves more and more, faster and faster, because the dopamine system doesn't have an off switch.

After reading this I walked around Union Square and studied the consumers flowing in and out of the stores. "Go on you rats," I thought, "Get your cheese!" And this is what capitalism has made of us. We're a herd of slightly evolved primates gobbling salt, sugar, fat and status. We buy objects that light up our brains with dopamine even if we throw those same things away or incur debt. Using my new Chinese-made smartphone, I punched up Jay-Z's song "Big Pimpin'" and bobbed my head, his nasal voice the soundtrack to thousands of New Yorkers shopping. "Big pimpin,'" he rapped, "Spending cheese."

THE CHEETO IN THE CRACK PIPE

Going home on the B52 bus, I saw a father feeding his infant daughter bright, yellow, puffy Cheetos. I wanted to smack it out of his hand and yell, "This is crack! Why don't you just put the Cheetos in a pipe and have her

smoke it?" But I closed my mouth and rolled my eyes instead.

The baby grabbed the Cheetos and I imagined the Yellow 6 dye that makes it day-glow food entering her blood. In laboratory tests, it caused kidney tumors and contained carcinogens. Good job, Dad! She licked her lips because the hydrogenated oil makes the Cheetos so tasty. If she grows up eating snacks like these, her heart will eventually become a wheezing accordion.

My stop came and I stepped off the bus, seeing as if for the first time the many fast-food places and bodegas lining Nostrand Avenue. They are the two major institutions in working-class urban neighborhoods. Over 200,000 fast food restaurants open their doors each morning in America. Sometimes it seems all of them are in Bed-Stuy.

Each institution has a goal and the fast food industry is designed not to nourish bodies but to make profits. What was a \$6 billion industry in 1970 raked in \$160 billion last year. It did this by playing on our evolutionary buttons. Salt, sugar, fat — over the course of millions of years our bodies evolved to crave these tastes because it signaled the presence of much-needed nutrients.

We are physiologically adapted to survive famine. Our primeval ancestors roaming the high grass of the ancient savannah often had to endure hunger. Some hunters did not always have the best aim with the spear. Feast and famine marked us. We inherited a craving for fat, salt or sugar, and when any of them hits

our tongues, our brain's opioid system goes off like fireworks and the dopamine begins to flow. It is our gastronomical weak spot, one that the modern food industry has targeted. Our bodies are garbage cans to dump junk into as long as it makes profit.

This February, the *New York Times* ran an article with a disturbing scene. Entitled "The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Food," it opened with a meeting of the 11 heads of America's major food corporations. The vice president of Kraft told attendees that the industry had gone too far in producing foods that excite hunger and overwhelm the body's controls on overeating. He cited statistics showing more than half of Americans were overweight and nearly one-quarter were obese. The head of General Mills, Stephen Sanger, got up and said, "Don't talk to me about nutrition. Talk to me about taste, and if this stuff tastes better, don't run around trying to sell stuff that doesn't taste good." The meeting took place in 1999. In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 35.7 percent of Americans are overweight, along with one third of our children.

Walking home, I often see obese women like giant water balloons, out of breath just from walking. Children, faces swollen with fat, throw candy on the counter at the local bodega. Every day, thousands of people in my neighborhood get breakfast, lunch and dinner from fast-food places or bodegas. Eating well takes time and money. And when you have neither, you get what you can. And here food

is fast. It's cheap. It's addictive. And it's deadly. Not long ago, I saw an ambulance outside the adjacent building; my neighbor said his friend had died. He shook his head and said, "She was 50, only 50, and caught a heart attack."

THE NAG FACTOR

Capitalism — the private ownership over the means of production. It is the world of labor behind every smartphone, every Cheeto, every commodity. It is the factory and the workers inside. It is the bosses, regional managers and owners rising above the masses of workers in a vast pyramid of power.

Defenders of the system say that it raises incomes and life-spans and serves the needs of consumers. But in a dialectical reversal, we can point at clear evidence that capitalism does not serve our needs but creates consumers to serve its need of making profit. It's a global conveyor belt where raw material is transformed into commodities, shipped to markets to be sold. But consumer are not born but made.

While waiting for my laundry to dry, I heard a kid screaming at his mother for Lucky Charms. I mean this kid was hollering like an N.F.L. coach. His veins bulged at his neck. "Ma, get me the Charms," he shouted, "The Charms! The Lucky Charms!" She looked haggard and took him outside and when they came back he was scooping the cereal into his mouth.

The nagging scene struck a memory. Once home, I looked up a documentary called

The Corporation; in it, Lucy Hughes, Vice President of Initiative Media and co-creator of the report "The Nag Factor," said, "We asked parents to keep a diary and to record every time a child nagged them for a product. Anywhere from 20 percent to 40 percent of purchases would not have occurred unless the child nagged their parents."

She had the smug smile of someone paid well enough to not care. Later Professor Susan Linn of Baker's Children Center said the study was done by corporations to get children to nag for their products. Linn was sad eyed. It was like she stared at the face of a juggernaut of money and power that she could analyze but not stop. She said, "Children are not little adults. Marketers are playing into their development vulnerabilities. The advertising that children are exposed to today is honed by psychologists and enhanced by media technology."

Later Hughes reappeared, "You can manipulate consumers into wanting and buying your products. It's a game." Again that smug smile, she concluded, "They are tomorrow's adult consumer, so start talking with them now... and you got them as an adult. Someone asked me, 'Lucy is that ethical? You're essentially manipulating children.' Is it ethical, I don't know but our mission at Initiative is to move product."

To move product — into the bodies of children even at risk to their health and by target-

Continued on next page

CHICAGO ★ JUNE 27-30

SOCIALISM 2013

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE have come to the understanding that capitalism is no longer working. From extreme weather caused by climate change and the relentless drive to slash workers' living standards to the epidemic of police brutality, the signs of a society in crisis are all around us. The question isn't whether society has run amok; the question is what to do about it.

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Abbie Bakan	Paul Kellogg	Ahmed Shawki
Martha Biondi	Deepa Kumar	Gregg Shutwell
Michele Bollinger	Kari Lyderson	Hani Shukrallah
Mark Clements	Paul Le Blanc	Michael Steven Smith
Antonis Davanellos	Scott McLemee	Sharon Smith
Neil Davidson	David McNally	Lee Sustar
Lamis Deek	China Miéville	Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor
Sue Ferguson	Khury Petersen-Smith	Dao X. Tran
Phil Gasper	Charlie Post	Alan Wald
Joel Geier	Barbara Ransby	Suzanne Weiss
Sam Gindin	John Riddell	Chris Williams
Glenn Greenwald	Stephanie Rivera	Sherry Wolf
Jesse Hagopian	Jennifer Roesch	Dave Zirin
Briana Hanny	Brian Roper	



UPCOMING EVENTS

FRI, JUNE 7 & SAT JUNE 8 • 8pm

SUN, JUNE 9 • 7pm

ON WHEELS PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS:

HENRIK IBSEN'S A DOLL HOUSE

Directed by Ted Thompson

Sliding scale: \$10/\$15/\$25

FRI, JUNE 14 • 5:30-7:30pm

12-SESSION CLASS BEGINS

Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment (1790)

Russell Dale

Sliding scale: \$95-\$125

THURS, JUNE 27 • 7:30pm

FILM SCREENING/DISCUSSION

The Untold Story

Dan Georgakas, Kostis Karpozilos, Eric Poulos

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

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Addiction

Continued from previous page

ing their soft minds. How can one talk of freedom of choice when corporations target us before we have the ability to choose at all? The advertising bullseye hovers on us through our lives. As adults, it is our unconscious minds that are hit. Brand names are stitched on clothes, products are placed in movies. Images are slipped under our consciousness and descend into our psychic depths where they grow into decisions that we mistake for our own free will.

Capitalism — this system of private ownership of the means of production rose from the collapse of feudalism, under which armored nobility in castles and cloaked monks in monasteries ruled over ragged peasants. It spread in the artisan towns and city states of the late Middle Ages, it spread with the enclosure of land as serfs, hungry and desperate, moved to factory work in the cities, it spread overseas in the New World conquest, the slave trade and colonization, it spread around the earth in violent racist colonialism. And now it dominates human civilization and has spread into our childhoods, our dreams and seeks to determine the destiny of our species.

THE BODY VERSUS CAPITALISM

One of the most famous scenes in recent film history was from *The Matrix*, when the protagonist Neo is offered a red pill by a terrorist named Morpheus. He takes it and after plunging down a surreal dream wakes up hooked to cables in a gooey pod. He looks around and sees billions of pods with people sleeping inside.

It resonated because we experience Capitalism as turning our bodies against us. It is a parasitical system that feeds on us. It takes our tongues and blinds us with taste. It floods our unconscious with logos. It takes our desire and puts a price tag on it. And dizzy with sensation and directed by commercials, we work ourselves numb to become landfills for commodities.

Is this the destiny of our species? Is this the highest we can imagine, the enslavement of millions to work making products and enslaving millions more to buy them? It seems the tragedy of our civilization is that by being walled in with commodities, we lose sight of how rare and precious we truly are.

Our ability to create, to be conscious, to imagine is a spark of beauty in the void. Humanity is the result of a series of near improbable accidents. It is a sheer accident that we exist at all, that billions of years ago, hot rock formed a planet at this distance from the sun, that ice-loaded meteors hit earth and gave it water, that in the sea microbes ignited into life and plants swept over land.

When visiting the Museum of Natural History, I imagine the T-Rex skeleton chomping up one or two visitors in a swift bite. It's easy to feel how lucky we got with that comet impact 66 million years ago. And that's what I mean. It's an accident we're here at all.

And yet here we are. The universe may teem with life but most likely it is microbes on rocks or germs in seas. Sentient life that looks up and questions is infinitely rare. Our ability to look far into space and deep into the atom, to follow the trail of elements to the origin of reality and to know its end, is incredibly precious. We, so far as we know, are the only species that is the living memory of the universe.

The human body — lulled into commodity addiction, brainwashed by advertising is itself evidence of the grand-narrative of evo-

lution that surpasses capitalism. Over millions of years, natural selection sculpted us to fit the environment until we began to adapt the environment to fit our needs. Now we are trapped in an economic system that does not serve us but ensnares us to serve it. But the history of revolutions and art and crime show us a truth about ourselves. Our power to imagine is greater than our need to obey.

NEURO-JUSTICE

Freedom: 1. The absence of constraint on choice or action. 2. The liberation from slavery or from the power of another.

This is the land of the free and the home of the brave. Hey, buddy, it's a free country, right? In cliché sayings, we're reminded that freedom is our social ideal. In the iconic scenes of U.S. history we learn that our nation's flag was planted on the moon by an astronaut, our armies can strike anywhere, anytime, and even a black man can become president of a country that once had slavery.

But the daily evidence of that freedom is on the stacked store shelves and in the advertisements that teach us about the capitalist Good Life. But what if on either side of the commodity existed millions of people who were not free at all?

What if we saw that behind the label is a world of misery? There, suicidal men and women grind their lives against a factory clock to make our low-cost clothing and technology. They see no exit but death and leap from the roof to the only freedom left to claim. There, undocumented workers pick tomatoes and staff the blood-soaked killing floors of meat factories to get us our cheap fast food.

And in front of the label is us — people whose unconscious is shaped by subliminal advertising, our need for intimacy and recognition commodified into market experiences of bought and sold emotional labor. Our bodies are given addictive products that make us crave self-destruction. We who live in a market-dominated world are not free, but are chemically enslaved by the very sophisticated science of corporate America.

A step we can take in freeing ourselves is critiquing capitalism differently. To the older frame of political economy focused on production, distribution and consumption of commodities we must add a new frame. One possibility is thinking in terms of a physiological economy, in which the body is transformed into a consuming machine and directed to the market where it's a commodity dumping ground, regardless of the health effects on it. Putting the body at the center creates a goal of respecting human potential.

And what might help is the idea of *neuro-justice* as a New Millennial update on natural rights. We have as human beings a right to develop ourselves. We are inheritors of a cosmic accident that created the earth in the seething, plasma-hot, shooting gallery of space. We are inheritors of millions of years of evolution, and each of us belongs to a thing rare and precious in the universe, sentient life.

Behind our eyes, in our brains is a power greater than reality. It's the power to imagine. A truly human civilization will move beyond capitalism, beyond addicting our consciousness to demanding space for it, play for it, love and recognition for it — it will demand justice for the imagination. In that world, we can walk home and see no corporate ads or stores with addictive foods or feel itchy for the newest technology or desperate for status. We can be free by simply being ourselves.

Party Like It's 1937

A HISTORIAN OF THE NEW YORK LEFT SAYS THERE'S MUCH TO BE LEARNED FROM THE COMMUNIST EXPERIENCE

BY GERALD MEYER

In 1819, in the very wake of triumphant counterrevolution, Percy Shelley, in the last line of his most radical poem, *The Masque of Anarchy*, reminded those defeated: "Ye Are Many; They Are Few." Embedded in this epigram is a sense of the inevitable overturn of societies structured so the productive majority perpetually loses to the acquisitive minority. William Blake had previously moved Shelley's promise toward potential realization when, in 1804, he pledged that with unidentified comrades, we "will not cease from mental fight nor let the sword sleep in our hands ... until we build ... Jerusalem in Britain's green and pleasant Land."

The job of the Left is to bring this promise to fruition. Today, New York City is the site of the greatest income inequality in the United States. In 2012, the top one percent garnered almost 40 percent of the total income generated by the entire economy of the richest city in the world. Sadly, at the moment of its greatest relevance, the Left has failed in both the United States and Europe to advance a program or the means for its fulfillment. While the people are demanding a way out of this deadlocked misery, the Left offers vacuous slogans, elaborations on democratic procedures and clumsy political pageantry.

The essential weapons at the Left's disposal are an understanding of history and a capability to build organizations. These are intrinsically connected pursuits.

Karl Marx awakened millions by affirming, "The [written] history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle. ... [It has been] an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight."

Marx's reading of history enabled him to see that the oppressed, even when they constituted nearly 90 percent of the population, were unable to reconstitute their societies until the advent of capitalism. Concurrent with the mines and the dark, satanic mills, capitalism created a new class: wage workers, men and women who crowded into cities with swelling populations to work in enterprises with larger and larger numbers of employees. These wage workers had the unprecedented opportunity to become aware of themselves as a class and the possibility of radically changing society. Based on necessity, they organized to fight for their collective rights, which had genuine potential for positive outcomes.

The period of history from the founding of The First International in 1864 to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 represents an epoch of stupendous achievement for the working classes and oppressed peoples of the entire world. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 established a state dedicated to building socialism, the Soviet Union began to industrialize and implement universal education. Based on the leadership of the Communist Party, millions of people, with little or no experience in running governments or building economies, formed a society where disparities

of wealth were minimal, unemployment was unknown and education, medicine, public transportation, culture, rent and utilities were free or of nominal cost. Outside the Socialist Bloc, mass socialist and Communist parties vied with liberal and conservative parties, and often with each other, for political power.

COMMUNIST PARTY USA, REVISITED

The achievements of the Communist Party USA (CP), whose membership never exceeded 100,000, were remarkable and, in many respects, are still instructive. The CP built organizations that led movements that responded to the actual, urgent needs of the Party's member and supporters as well as the enormous constituencies it intended to enlist in the wider struggle.

Curiously, because of the drastic decline of the industrial working class, the experience of the CP's greatest success, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, may be the least relevant to present conditions. The creation, from the ground up, of industrial unions, where membership (unlike trade unions which organized only workers of a particular craft) included all workers of an industry, brought together in the same organization African-Americans, immigrants and women with the relatively privileged "old-stock," white male workers. In CIO-organized factories, not only were the workers' wages much higher than those that prevailed among nonunion workers, the disparities in the wages of unskilled to highly skilled workers were far smaller. The CP played a key role in organizing the Steel Workers' and the Automobile Workers' unions. The twelve CP-led CIO unions, with nearly one million members, were expelled from the CIO in 1949.

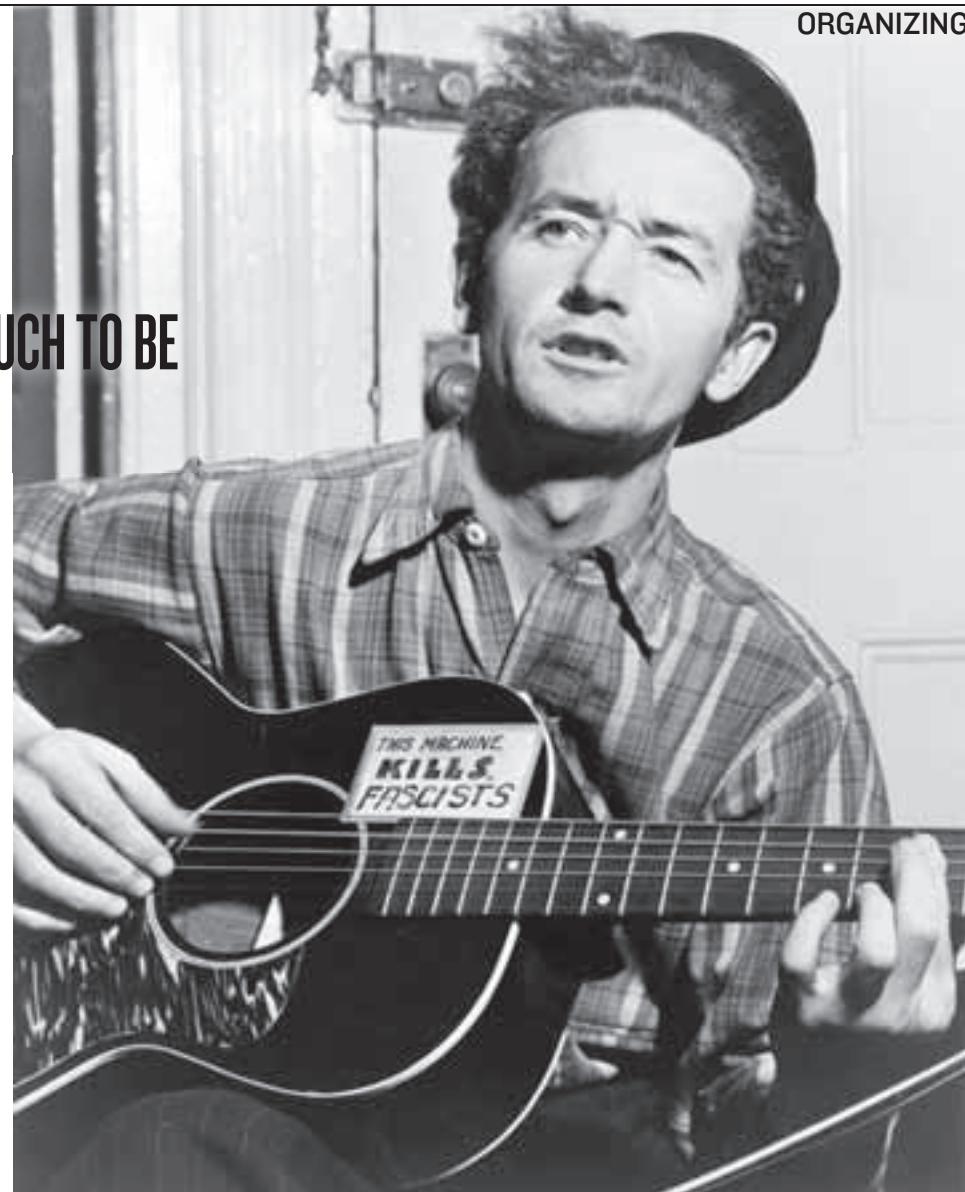
Less well-known, less-studied CP-led organizations have more immediate meaning to the rebuilding of a Left today. From its founding in 1925, the International Labor Defense (ILD) employed a dual strategy: It provided outstanding legal counsel while launching mass movements with as wide a reach as possible to victims of class and race oppression.

THE INFLUENCE OF EACH COMMUNIST PARTY ORGANIZATION WAS MULTIPLIED BY THE COORDINATION OF THEIR EFFORTS.

Successes included the internationalization of the campaign to save Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, the freeing of "labor martyr" Tom Mooney, saving the Scottsboro Boys and the Supreme Court's overturning the conviction of Angelo Herndon, an African-American Communist organizer accused of insurrection.

FIGHTING FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

The American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born (ACPFB), founded in 1923, provided legal aid to foreign-born Americans who faced deportation due to their political affiliations and activities. Simultaneously, it assisted immigrants in obtaining citizenship, mobilized public opinion on legislation affecting the foreign born and engendered sentiment for a multicultural United States.



GIVING VOICE TO THE LEFT: At its height, the Communist Party USA exerted a wide influence, including on popular culture. Woody Guthrie (above) wrote "This Land Is Our Land" and hundreds of other songs about the struggles of working people during the Great Depression. Though he wasn't officially a member of the party, he participated in many CP-associated groups such as the Communist Party newspaper *The Daily Worker*, for which he wrote a column called "Woody Sez."

The International Workers Order (IWO), a fraternal benefit society founded by the Party in 1930, organized into one "general" (that is, English-speaking) and fourteen "nationality" sections, offered low-cost term-life, burial and disability insurance policies while promoting cultural programs and first-language learning. The IWO's membership peaked in 1947 at 185,000 men and women organized into over two thousand lodges. The IWO functioned to finance the Party's foreign-language press, which reached a circulation of 400,000 in 1944. While drawing its members away from the Americanizing commercial culture, the IWO drew its members into the wider political Left under the slogan "Americans All."

In 1944, a Left coalition dominated by the CP gained the leadership of the American Labor Party (ALP), which on average garnered 15 percent of the city's vote. The ALP ensured

the election of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia to his second and third terms and the reelections of East Harlem's

Vito Marcantonio, the ALP's sole member in the House of Representatives. There he functioned as an eloquent, tireless spokesperson for the American Left; in 1950, he cast the sole vote against U.S. intervention in the Korean Civil War.

THE BENEFITS OF COORDINATION

The CP-led and -influenced organizations shared a common political outlook and culture: Their individual missions were viewed as fulfilling the longer-range goal of challenging capitalism itself. These organizations, while advocating for wider changes, provided some means for immediate relief. CP-style politics gave opportunities for activists, many of whom had limited education, to develop talents and skills that empowered them in their political work and their lives. Emblematic of

all CP-led organizations was its inclusion of African-Americans and other minorities in their leadership and a socialization of whites to discourage attitudes of white chauvinism, that is, the pervasive sense of entitlement and superiority characteristic among many on the Left.

The influence of each organization was multiplied by the coordination of their efforts: IWO lodges served as meeting places for the CIO organization drives; the IWO could reach deeply into nationality communities where many, fearful of the consequences of membership, willingly contributed and participated in the Party's campaigns. In turn, the Party adopted a cultural pluralistic modus operandi. An excellent example of the coordination of these organizations to achieve an overarching goal was their mobilization to ensure Marcantonio's election. The CP-led New York City General Labor Council, the foreign-language press and the general resources of the ALP were concentrated on sending Marc back to Washington.

There is much to learn from this history, but history is not a cookbook from which we select favorite recipes. We must draw inspiration and leads which have the potential of producing tangible gains for the people, while struggling for wider, longer-lasting remedies. We must go to the people, not as missionaries but as junior partners with skills and comradeship. We must build trust among ourselves that is based on actions. Let's get started down a path that offers genuine hope of success. This is a life's work for a life worth living.

Gerald Meyer is a professor of history at Hostos Community College (CUNY). He is the author of Vito Marcantonio: Radical Politician, 1902-1954.

Homophobia

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street or in the workplace, and these kinds of discrimination must be battled with different strategies.

In Queens, Make the Road has been one of the few organizations fighting ho-

mophobia and transphobia. In Jackson Heights, a predominantly working class, immigrant community, where its office is based and where I live, the Make the Road model creates a link between young people of color, parents, immigrant workers, tenants and LGBT folks. Such community support creates real visible change, which

can be seen when heterosexual allies explain to a group of non-LGBTQ people that the LGBT community deserves to be respected, or when politicians pay attention to people speaking about how unfair legislation affects diverse groups of people, including those who are LGBT. We are seeing that on both the personal and

political level, people increasingly feel that LGBT rights are also immigrants' rights, workers' rights, tenants' rights and human rights, and this is creating a much stronger and more connected movement.

Steve Williams

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day-to-day campaign work, I recognized my tendency to connect people's comments to my pre-existing ideas. Months of asking the same questions to some of the most thoughtful people in the movement with no pressure to emerge with an answer taught me the creative potential of spacious listening. I like to think that my assessments and recommendations are stronger now because I took in the richness of others' thinking.

I had predicted that we would be inspired by the gritty and determined work that is happening across the country, and we were not disappointed. The imaginativeness driving so much important work is inspiring, but we were still left with the question of what it might take to bring the different strands of these efforts together into

a larger whole. Given the difficulty that I'd witnessed in developing shared work in local, statewide and national spaces, I expected widely different assessments to emerge from the interviews, but I was surprised by the consensus that emerged. The people we interviewed shared remarkably common assessments of the state of the world and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the movement.

A SHARED DESIRE

Coupled with this, an overwhelming number of people we interviewed talked about their desire to shift the way that their work is being done. They want connection to a larger movement. They want to feel engaged in a project to change the world for the better — even if that means abandoning some of the institutions and identities that have gotten us to this point. Repeatedly, people talked about wanting

to feel like they are a part of a team — just like me.

We began this project because it filled a need that Ntanya and I felt, but over the course of almost a year and dozens of interviews, I see we weren't alone. We would often receive emails and phone calls from people in Detroit, New York, Atlanta, Albuquerque and Los Angeles asking us about how the project was coming along. Frankly, we were surprised, but this was a need that many of us felt. This interest pushed us to be more rigorous in writing *More than We Imagined*, which summarizes our findings from the interviews.

NTanya and I traveled to more than 30 different communities across the United States to interview 158 organizers and activists, three-fourths of whom came of age after the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Clearly, there are a lot

of people that we missed, and NTanya and I have started to joke about what it might mean to do a second round of interviews. We're not rushing into that right now because we really want to hear people's reactions and thoughts to this report of the first round.

In the end, I'm thankful for this last year because it's shown me that if I were given a choice, this is the moment of history that I'd choose to be alive and active. I'd choose this time because I see that there are hundreds, if not tens of thousands of people out there, longing and dreaming and working for a world based on solidarity, liberation and sustainability. I see that I am not alone. After doing finishing this phase of the Ear to the Ground project, I know that there's a community that I'm proud to be a part of and that there's more of us than I ever imagined.

NTanya Lee

Continued from page 8

how they're positioned in our society. Also, we want to have people in leadership of a transformative movement who have the most at stake in changing and overturning the current system.

JT: Many of the people you spoke with are active in base-building organizations. Can you describe what you mean by "base building" and why it is important?

NL: By base building, we mean doing membership recruitment, leadership development and campaign work to build organized bases of poor, usually working class people who can identify their own issues, their own campaigns and make demands that meet their own demands. There's no social movement in the history of the world that hasn't rested ultimately on local, organized bases of people as a core to moving things forward.

JT: Why do people stick with social justice work? It's not an easy path to be on.

NL: People are not in it for the money, clearly. One thing I would pull out is that people need a community of people who share their values and who are going to consistently support the work you are doing. It's not enough to be doing activist work and protesting and working on campaigns. We have to be really building

relationships of trust with each other so that we can be with each other through hard and good times. Ultimately, we say, the movement should be "magnetic." The work should be the kind of work that makes people feel good and want to stay in. It should be hard work. It should involve personal sacrifice, as most work does. But if we're trying to build a new kind of society as we do our work, the work should be fulfilling. And part of what makes it fulfilling is that we care about each other.

JT: What does it mean to be a leftist as opposed to being a liberal? The media often blurs the two.

NL: To be on the Left is to be explicitly anti-capitalist and to oppose the forms of oppression that are embedded within capitalism like white supremacy and patriarchy. People who are opposed to those systems and are seeking a society that replaces them are who I consider to be on the Left. Many people who consider themselves liberal want to improve the current system so there's less poverty perhaps, but are basically fine with the current economic system.

Many of the people we interviewed do reform work as liberals do, but they do it with a different purpose and in a different way, with the leadership of working class people for example. They do it with a movement-building orientation that isn't just about advancing short-term organiza-

tional interests. 65 percent of the people we heard from identified as anti-capitalist and most times they said: "I'm not speaking for my organization, I'm speaking personally." I think it's very significant that the personal politics of the individuals in the social justice sector are to the left of their organizations. And I think increasingly so.

JT: Many of the people you and Steve spoke with hesitated to give their political beliefs a label. Why is that?

NL: People's discomfort at identifying has more to do with the lack of meaningful labels to identify with. So many people said, "Well, I think I'm a socialist, but I don't know what that means in the 21st century." People don't want to use labels that they're not sure what they mean right now in this period. People don't want to be boxed in and targeted but not be able to fully articulate and defend their own ideas. Ultimately this lack of clear alternatives on the Left is a structural problem, not an individual one.

JT: The Left puts much of its energy into ameliorating the damage done by conservative policies while the Right continues to heavily invest in propagating its ideology and thus tilting the political terrain further in its favor. How do you get out of this dynamic?

NL: We need a vision of an alternative

society. We need to answer basic questions about the current conditions of experience and then we can develop a long-term strategy for change. When we have that kind of plan, that's what's going to make us feel powerful and in fact be powerful, and have the guts to do the kind of crazy things the right-wing does because they're just so unapologetic about their goals and policies. We too can be that unapologetic, but in a strategic way, and not mistake militancy for strategy.

I see the readiness of people to act, but it was clear in going around the country and talking to people that our level of analysis is not deep enough. We're not ready. Groups of us have to get together and do that rigorous level of analysis that can produce a strategy that makes some damn sense.

JT: What would winning look like?

NL: We're only going to get economic justice in a new system after capitalism, but it's insufficient to replace it with a system that's just going to raise the standard of living. That to me is where the Left is coming from in the 21st century. We need a new society based on protagonism that values full and deep participation of everyday people. Radical democracy and full human development are the goals of winning. That's ultimately what we want.

For more, see www.eartothegroundproject.org.

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20 years

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Taking Aim at Gun Violence

9mm America
PERFORMED BY GIRL BE HEARD
DIRECTED BY ASHLEY MARINACCIO

Gun violence has been very much in the public mind lately, from the December shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School to Mark Carson's recent death in New York City and the Mother's Day parade shooting in New Orleans. If you want some evidence that the next generation takes the problem seriously and isn't resigned to its own destruction, you should see *9mm America*.

This arresting production, exploring how gun violence affects our lives, comes courtesy of Girl Be Heard, a theater collective that gives young women a venue to write and perform socially conscious plays under professional guidance. The show debuted on June 1, but I had a chance to see the work-in-progress, while the delivery of the lines was still being honed and scenes were being mixed, matched and cut. Based on the play's power, even at that stage, I would encourage readers to go see the final product. This one's going to hit hard.

Girl Be Heard productions draw material both from participants' personal experience around an is-

sue and research into other people's experience. Some of what emerges is straight narrative and some is more impressionistic. On the heels of *Trafficked*, about sex trafficking, *9mm America* leans in the more impressionistic direction. It is a series of personal stories, à la *Vagina Monologues*, that morph with great ease into defiant raps, mournful arias, bracing polyrhythmic stomp-and-clap dances, and other, freer verse forms. Diverse as the actors' experiences are, the disparate strands add up to an inescapable message about systemic violence and the apathy and greed that perpetuate it.

The play has its share of iconic moments. Among them are a sarcastic primer on armed machismo called "Guns 101" and a catchy song and dance that bookends the play with shout-outs to the global victims of violence: "From Liberia to the Congo, from Palestine down to Mexico."

However, perhaps the most powerful of these moments is the one that veers most obviously into the world of childhood in the form of a double-Dutch game. The actors jump into the churning ropes and enter a state of palpable elation as they dodge and weave and the ropes (or violence? or heartbreak?) pass mere inches under their feet. This contrast highlights just how freighted the words and motions have been so far. The fleeting moment of play captures that precious

innocence that surprising numbers of children still manage to cling to, even when those in charge have failed to protect them from violence and want.

Company member Betsy Perez said in a post-rehearsal interview that she found herself seeking to present a balanced message in the show. The real-world ravages of gun violence are felt disproportionately in communities of color, and Perez didn't want to shy away from that — but, she explained, at the same time, "We didn't just want to make it tunnel vision ... a racial thing. ... It's an epidemic [in] America as a whole. ... Even if you're not directly affected, you're affected regardless." (In fact, one rap from the play warns us that "some of the illest killas come from rich villas"). Perez's colleague, Melanie Martins, elaborated with her view about the mass media, citing the formulaic, factoid-heavy presentation of news as a major culprit and saying that viewers act as though, "just because the news went off, the issue went away too."

While Perez and Martins draw inspiration for the production from their own truly horrific experiences with gun violence, the production has been an eye-opening experience for Monica Furman, who relates that she fell into that same out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality by living in a relatively safe neighbor-



Briani Michelle and cast of *9mm America*.

ASHLEY MARINACCIO

hood. "I felt like I was in a bubble and it just got burst by the creation of this show."

Ashley Marinaccio, GBH's founder and artistic director, steers with a sure hand and a heart that knows when to be heavy or light. She prodded the actors to think critically about potential solutions to these problems, beyond the confines of the play, so that the lines would read authentically: Do we change the law? Do we protest in the street? Do we reduce the military budget? There is no easy, sin-

gle answer, but that doesn't faze the participants. Though the play doesn't bring all good news by a long shot, it's clear that some bright young minds, with plenty of life ahead of them, are gearing up to meet the challenges.

— DAVID MEADOW

9mm America runs through June 19 at the Robert Moss Theater, at 440 Lafayette Street. For tickets, showtimes and more, see www.girlbeheard.org/9mm-america.

JUNE THEATER LISTINGS

THE OCCUPATION

WRITTEN BY KEN FERRIGNI

DIRECTED BY JOE JUNG

In 2017, a crushing national debt, skyrocketing inflation, and crippling unemployment have frozen the United States' access to global credit. Against the backdrop of economic catastrophe, the U.S. government finds an unexpected savior when China purchases Florida for \$5 trillion. But there is a radical, violent insurgency holed up in the Everglades attempting to oust the Chinese proconsul and his army. How far will this militia go to keep the States united?

June 6–23

Wed–Sat at 8pm, Sat & Sun at 2pm

No performance Sun, June 9

Added performance Mon, June 10 at 8pm

TBG Theatre, 312 W 36th St

\$18: Smarttix, 212-868-4444 or smarttix.com
projecttheater.org

BOOTSTRAPS

WRITTEN BY BEN CLAWSON

DIRECTED BY ARTEM YATSNOV

It's midnight in the forlorn warehouses of the Branch Hill Industrial Supply Company. A band of low-rung employees have been called in late on special assignment, coincidentally on the

same night the promotion to the mythic position of Corporate Representative might finally be available...but only for tonight. This odd little comedy investigates if there's anything they won't compromise, sacrifice or betray to get ahead, and where the hell "ahead" even is.

June 13–22

Thurs–Sat at 7pm

Under St. Mark's, 94 St. Mark's Pl

\$18 (includes a free beer): horsetrade.info or Smarttix, 212-868-4444 or smarttix.com
strangedogtheatre.com

MANNA-HATA

WRITTEN BY BARRY ROWELL

DIRECTED BY BARRY ROWELL AND KATHLEEN AMSHOFF

MANNA-HATA (from the indigenous Lenape tribe's name for the island) is the extraordinary true story of the transformation of New York City from a small island to a booming metropolis. Featuring famous scoundrels (Peter Stuyvesant, Boss Tweed, Robert Moses); artistic legends (Walt Whitman, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Dorothy Parker); and other beloved City figures (Emily Roebling, Jane Jacobs, Shirley Chisholm). MANNA-HATA shares tales of graft, oppression and violence, as well as stories, poems and songs of love dedicated to the Great City herself.

June 7–23

Thurs–Sun at 7pm

Added performance Mon, June 10 at 7pm

The Farley Post Office, 425 8th Ave

\$18: 866-811-4111 or peculiarworks.org
peculiarworks.org

PLANET CONNECTIONS THEATRE FESTIVITY

New York's premiere eco-friendly/socially conscious not-for-profit arts festival. Fostering a diverse cross-section of performances, the festivity seeks to inspire artists and audiences both creatively and fundamentally, in a festive atmosphere forming a community of like-minded artists. Each show forms a partnership with a charity to solicit donations, holds a fund-raising event or otherwise finds a way to help out.

Through June 23. For the full festival schedule, see www.planetconnections.org.

Indy Picks for Planet Connections Theatre Festivity:

THE PROCEDURE

WRITTEN BY MARCUS YI

DIRECTED BY MARCUS YI AND SONIA NAM

2020 America. Gay marriage is legal and the path to citizenship requires a microchip implant. Adrian and Jacob must choose between each other or their personal freedom.

Sat, June 8 at 12:30pm

Fri, June 14 at 9pm

Mon, June 17 at 4:30pm

Thurs, June 20 at 5pm

The Gene Frankel Theatre, 24 Bond St

\$18:

planetconnections.org/the-way-to-the-moon

GOOD SHAPE

WRITTEN BY ASHLEY MARINACCIO AND BRADY AMMONCLARK

Good Shape is a new documentary play that explores the relationship between capitalism, consumer culture and self-hatred. Beginning with filmed interviews, Good Shape dares to explore the reasons why we don't love our bodies, what the societal factors could be, and how we can begin to heal as a culture.

Sat, June 15 at 11:30am

The Robert Moss, 440 Lafayette St

Free: Reserve at planetconnections.org/good-shape

MARINA

WRITTEN BY DON NIGRO

DIRECTED BY IVETTE DUMENG

In 1941, poet Marina Tsvetayeva must write propaganda for Stalin or go to his death camps. Her obsessive writing, fueled by passionate affairs, has made her family strangers. Was her gentle husband a Soviet assassin? With writing no longer possible, can she summon the courage to live, or to die?

Sat, June 15 at 3:30pm

Mon, June 17 at 5pm

Tues, June 18 at 7:30pm

Wed, June 19 at 6pm

Fri, June 21 at 9pm

Sat, June 22 at 6:30pm

The Robert Moss, 440 Lafayette St

\$18: Reserve at planetconnections.org/marina

— ROBERT GONYO & ASHLEY MARINACCIO

Youth Revolt

Something in the Air (Après Mai)
DIRECTED BY OLIVIER ASSAYAS
MK2, FRANCE 3 CINEMA AND
VORTEX SUTRA, 2012

“Between us and heaven, hell or nothingness, there is only life, the most fragile thing in the world.” A philosophy teacher reads out this quote by the French thinker Blaise Pascal to a classroom of inert teenagers draped over their chairs. A few seconds later, you see the same youngsters running for their lives, pursued by riot police with clubs in the cobble-stoned streets of 1970s Paris. *Something In the Air (Après Mai)* is director Olivier Assayas’ ode to that period, and to his own coming of age in the immediate aftermath of the May 1968 uprisings, as the French title suggests.

Against the backdrop of the ‘70s, the director paints a flowing portrait of youth in all its incredible frailty and perseverance. Gilles, the lanky hero of the film, bears some resemblance to Assayas himself: raised in an affluent household in a Paris suburb with a father in the film industry and an ephemeral flirtation with violent left-wing groups.

This may explain why the movie errs on the side of being a whimsical retrospective rather than a feature film with a semi-coherent plot and a set of characters: Assayas is brilliant at recreating the atmosphere of the time, but he leaves his scantily-clad and loosely-sketched characters whimsically drifting around with a very meager sense of narrative.

As a great conjurer of context, Assayas has packed the film tight with cultural and historical references, ranging from the wonderful “Ballad of William Worthy” and tracks by The Soft Machine to the posters Gilles and his friends plaster the school with overnight and the authors they read. In fact, you can follow Gilles’ intellectual coming of age through the books scattered like clues throughout the movie: we see him buying Jean-Paul Sartre’s Maoist paper



Still of Lola Crétan and Clément Métayer in *Something in the Air*.

MK2 PRODUCTIONS

J'Accuse with change stolen from his father’s coat pocket; then, as he is driving down to Italy in a Volkswagen bus with a staunch band of Marxist filmmakers, one of them chides him for reading a critique of the Chinese cultural revolution (*Les Habits Neufs du President Mao* by Simon Leys). As Gilles’ skepticism with the humorless crew grows and he slips into a life of sun-drenched, naked hedonism, we glimpse a George Orwell book on his desk. Finally, in London where he works a day job on the set for a ridiculous blockbuster about Nazis and dinosaurs and soaks up experimental cinema at night, the last book we see him reading is on the Situationniste Internationale, the radical artist collective whose founder, Guy Debord, championed nihilistic individualism. Not entirely surprising: Assayas based this film on an earlier letter he had written to Alice Debord, the founder’s wife.

Gilles’ struggle to balance political engagement with art is reflected in his flirtations: while the sophisticated Laure leaves him, he is not sure about his feelings for the beautiful Christine, a relentless fighter for the working class. Laure ends up dead, Christine in the kitchen while her revolutionary filmmaker boyfriend discusses work on the patio and confuses feminists with lesbians. There are no easy answers.

It is difficult then not to laugh at the gravity with which Gilles, Christine, Laure and their friends take their search for political and creative outlets: spirit dancing, drip painting, petty disputes be-

tween militant fractions and casting rune dice for where to go next. To his credit, Assayas manages to follow their amblings with tenderness and respect, occasionally bringing the scenes to the point of simmering irony but never with too much of a bite.

This period and its dreamy generation has been rehashed a number of times in French cinema — occasionally steeped in nostalgia like Bernardo Bertolucci’s *The Dreamers*, or pepped up with humor like Cédric Klapisch’s *Le Péril Jeune*. But rarely has the unrest and engagement of the time been taken up with such dedicated seriousness as by Assayas.

Despite its earnestness, the film suffers from poor character development, which is a serious shortcoming for a feature primarily centered on the development of its characters. Gilles and his friends remain remarkably understated and listless whenever they are not running from the police, their voices deadpan even when discussing their passions. They may be meandering, but they never believe themselves to be lost — this is where the film’s ode to youth reveals its limits: growing up involves growth pains, but there is no real discomfort and therefore no real tension in the film. The youngsters remain poised, even when jumping into the void.

One of the young radicals’ illicit posters shows a mummy with a safety pin through its mouth. It reads: “Youth that worries too often about the future.” This rings truer than ever today. With the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring at the back of their minds, today’s audience is left with the sense that any collective struggle is also first and foremost an individual one, and the same concerns return time and again, in varying forms, as time goes by.

— ANNA POLONYI

Something in the Air (*Après Mai*) is currently playing the IFC Center. For more, see www.ifccenter.com.



Still of French students fleeing from riot police in *Something in the Air*.

9.5 THESES ON ART AND CLASS

Ben Davis

“Just when it seemed that contemporary art writing and the subject of real-life politics had permanently parted ways, along comes the young New York critic Ben Davis with a book that brings them together. No cheerleading here, no swoony prosody, no easy kiss-offs; just smart, ardent, illusion-puncturing observation and analysis on the intersection of art, commerce, and—the elephant in the art-fair VIP lounge—class. None of this would matter much if he didn’t tell us why we should care, but he does. Under all his excoriations lies a faith in art as an agent of transformation toward a post-neoliberal, post-greed society that could be, should be.”

—Holland Cotter, art critic, *New York Times*

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